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Letter dated 5 April 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I wish to refer to the incident last week in which two members of the Temporary Observer Force in Hebron (TIPH) were killed when their vehicle came under fire from a Palestinian gunman west of the city.

According to reports from a third TIPH member who was riding in the vehicle and was injured in the attack, a Palestinian terrorist in a Palestinian police uniform and armed with a Kalashnikov assault rifle opened fire on three members of the TIPH force. Despite the travellers' pleading with the gunman that they were members of TIPH and the fact that the vehicle was clearly marked with the organization's logo, the shooting continued until the gunman had used up all his ammunition. He then fled in the direction of Palestinian-controlled territory. Israel deeply regrets the deaths of these two TIPH members and joins with other members of the international community in expressing our sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims and to the Governments of Turkey and Switzerland.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time that Palestinian terrorism has endangered the lives and well-being of international personnel and humanitarian workers in the region. Just last week, on 27 March 2002, Isaiam Jibril, a Tanzim terrorist, was arrested by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) near Ramallah. At the time of his arrest, Jibril was working as the driver of a Red Crescent ambulance. Upon searching the ambulance, Israeli forces also discovered a belt, of the type used by suicide bombers, comprising 16 pipes and 10 kilograms of explosive material. The belt had been concealed under a medical mattress and a young child was sitting on top of it.

Other examples abound. Wafa Idris, the Palestinian terrorist that blew herself up on a Jerusalem street on 27 January 2002, had worked as a medical secretary for the Palestinian Red Crescent. The terrorist that sent Idris on her suicide mission was Mohammed Hababa, a Tanzim operative who worked as a driver for the Palestinian Red Crescent. Evidence suggests that Idris used her medical accreditation, and possibly even a Red Crescent vehicle, to gain access to Israel.

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On other occasions, Palestinian terrorists have initiated acts of violence while situated in close proximity to civilians or civilian installations. In the first months following the outbreak of violence in September 2000, Palestinian gunmen routinely opened fire on Israeli soldiers from the middle of crowds of civilians, including children. Terrorist organizations often situate their headquarters, offices, and bomb-making factories in residential apartment buildings hoping to avoid reprisals.

More recently, Palestinian terrorists took over St. Mary's Church and took a priest and a number of nuns hostage against their will. The terrorists used the Church as a firing position, from which they shot at IDF soldiers in the area. An IDF force was forced to enter the Church grounds and evacuate the priest and nuns. Similarly, at Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity, Palestinian gunmen seeking refuge there opened fire on Israeli soldiers in the area.

The use of humanitarian vehicles to transport weapons and explosives and the practice of situating terrorist bases in close proximity to civilians, international and humanitarian personnel or holy sites are predicated on the understanding that Israeli forces will not attack and endanger those targets. If Israel does respond to a terrorist attack and civilian casualties ensue, the terrorists can then exploit such casualties in the media as evidence of Israeli brutality. In the cold calculus of terrorism, this is considered a win-win situation.

Such tactics therefore constitute a cynical and deadly manipulation of Israeli goodwill and accepted international humanitarian norms for the perpetration of deadly violence against Israeli civilians. These are tactics that, if not resolutely addressed and condemned by the international community, threaten not only Israeli civilians, but the lives of humanitarian workers and international personnel all over the world. Furthermore, if such practices are permitted to become commonplace, it will substantially hinder the ability of the United Nations, the International Red Cross and other international bodies and humanitarian agencies to provide peacekeeping, humanitarian and other services in areas of conflict. Ultimately, it will prevent such organizations from carrying out their vital mandate.

The deaths of the TIPH members should serve to remind us once again that terrorism knows no boundaries and, if it is not firmly combated, poses a threat beyond its immediate targets. Addressing this threat requires, first and foremost, that we be willing to call terrorism by its name and to be fearless in placing blame where it is due. No terrorist group can be allowed to believe that it can continue to endanger innocent lives with impunity.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 166, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Yehuda **Lancry**
Permanent Representative